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Ohio News

Ohio River restoration to cost \$307 million

07/10/01

CINCINNATI - The Army Corps of Engineers wants \$307 million over the next 15 years to restore ecosystems along the Ohio River.

The project would include \$200 million in federal funding, none of which Congress has allocated so far.

The project, although extensive, would be dwarfed by the \$7.8 billion, 25-year restoration Washington authorized last year for the Florida Everglades. The Ohio River, a major source of drinking water and route for barges carrying coal and other cargoes, stretches 981 miles from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Ill.

Army engineers want to:

Restore 25,000 acres of bottom land hardwood forests, much of which was lost for fuel to steamboats or cleared for development.

Protect 40 islands and a hundred miles of pristine shoreline.

Restore 25,000 acres of wetlands and 1,250 acres of other property, both of which act as nurseries for fish and animals.

The plans may affect the health, function and future of the river.

"Overall, these would improve the ecological integrity of the system," said Jerry Schulte, a biologist with the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, a water pollution control agency.

President Bush's 2002 budget did not include any money for the restoration program. Sixty-five percent of it is to be paid for by

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federal tax dollars with the rest coming from local governments, state natural resource agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Michael Holley, a project manager for the corps, said no more than \$10 million per year would be spent in the first five years of the program; no more than \$15 million annually would be spent in the last 10 years.

Congress has yet to approve any of that \$200 million in federal funding, Holley said yesterday. The agency then would need to rely on state and local governments and nonprofit organizations along the Ohio River to provide the remaining \$107 million - 35 percent - of the funding, Holley said.

Each proposed project would be reviewed to examine its impact before funding is requested, Holley said.

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